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READABILITY SCORING BY THE FLESCH FORMULA NO. 2

The Flesch readability scoring is based on 100-word samples. You may wish to score the whole article if it's short (300 words or less). For longer manuscripts like publications, take regular samples like the second paragraph on every second page.

Start counting your 100 words at the beginning of a paragraph and put a bracket after the last word. This is your sample.

Finding the average sentence length is easy. Just divide the 100 words by the number of sentences. Almost always your 100-word sample will end somewhere in the middle of a sentence. Count that sentence if the sample ends in the last half of the sentence. On a 16-word sentence, count it as a full sentence if the sample ends on the ninth or any later word. Do not count it if your sample ends in the first half of the sentence--that is, on any word up to and including the eighth word in our 16-word example sentence.

In counting sentences, by the way, a semi-colon or colon counts as a period, IF there is a complete sentence on each side of it. For example, the next sentence is really two sentences since the clause on each side of the colon will stand alone. "Basically, a sentence consists of a subject, a verb and sometimes an object: Man builds house." The sentences in these first four paragraphs average 15 words.

The second factor in the Flesch formula is word length.

1. Your word length is the number of syllables per hundred words.
2. If your sample is less than 100 words, obtain your average word length and multiply it by 100. 125 syllables in 85 words equals 1.47 syllables per word, or 147 syllables per 100 words.
3. Count syllables the way you pronounce the word.
4. Count the number of syllables in symbols and figures according to the way they are read aloud. However, if a passage contains long figures, or more than a few, your estimate will be more accurate if you leave these figures out of the syllable count; in a 100-word sample, be sure to add a corresponding number of words after the 100-word mark.
5. As a practical shortcut, count all syllables except the first in all words of more than one syllable; then add the total to the number of words tested. It's easy to count syllables with this system by underlining them. Example: "one of the most valuable and essential lessons you will learn from your club work comes when you write up the story of your project." 25 words--32 syllables. In a 100-word sample, you might have 46 "extra" syllables, or 196 total for that sample.

Now we have the second factor in the formula.

Sentence length and word length, together, give the "Reading Ease" score. You can figure that from the scores given on the sheet titled "Reading Ease." It works just like a mileage chart on a roadmap.

Suppose your average sentence length is 15 words. Find that figure along the left side, vertical scale. And your average word length is 146 syllables per 100 words. Find that figure along the top, horizontal scale. Where do the two lines intersect? What's the figure shown there? Sixty eight, isn't it? Now follow the dividing lines diagonally to the left and to the bottom of the page. That score rates as "Standard." Notice that it's just on the border line of being "Fairly Easy."

You follow much the same steps to get the "Human Interest" score in your sample. This estimates how interesting your writing is.

First we count personal words. Put a circle around all personal words like these examples:

- a. Personal pronouns--we, you, us, they, our.
- b. All nouns with gender--man, woman, uncle, aunt, boy, girl--but do not count nouns with common gender.
- c. Names of people--John, Alice, Mr. Simpson (one word).
- d. The words "folks" and "people" count as personal words too. Add the number of personal words and convert that to per cent. On a 100-word sample, that's automatic. If you have six or eight personal words out of 100 (six to eight per cent), your writing is "Interesting" (readable non-fiction).

The other "Human Interest" factor is personal sentences. If 12 to 15 per cent of your sentences are personal, you're writing at the same "Interesting" level. Here are examples of personal sentences.

1. Spoken sentences: "I doubt it." We told him: "You can take it or leave it."
2. Exclamations: It's unbelievable! Amazing!
3. Questions: How did it happen? What should be done?
4. Directions, requests: File the letters alphabetically. Please answer at once.
5. Incomplete Sentences: No. Not so. Maybe later.
6. Other sentences directly addressed to the reader: This is a point you should remember.

31498

Remember to figure your personal sentences as per cent. One out of seven sentences is $\frac{1}{7}$ per cent, not one per cent. — —

Now refer to the other scoring sheet titled "Human Interest." Suppose you have seven per cent personal words (horizontal scale across top) and 16 per cent personal sentences (vertical scale at left side). The score where those two lines meet is 30. Running diagonally to the bottom left, that score rates as "Interesting."

The tables, "How Easy?" and "How Interesting?" give you a bird's eye view of the different levels of Reading Ease and Human Interest.



